AF Officer Probed as Report Cites Captured-Guns Traffic

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FT. WALTON BEACH, Fla., Nov. 30 — Military and civilian authorities are investigating reports that the super-secret Armament Laboratory at Eglin Air Force Base has been used to channel captured small arms from Vietnam to American civilian outlets.

The number of guns involved in the present probe probably is only a few dozen, but authorities are concerned that the pattern they are investigating could be a wide open conduit for putting military weapons into unauthorized hands.

The Office of Special Investigations is handling the probe for the Air Force. Civilian aspects are being handled by the Internal Revenue Service and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Division of the Treasury Department.

The Air Force confirmed that the activities of Lt. Col. P. A. Marriott, chief assistant at the Armament Laboratory, are under investigation in connection with the alleged arms leakage.

The investigation is officially described as "administrative" as opposed to criminal. No charges have been filed against Marriott, and he remains on active duty at the lab.

An unofficial Air Force source said that at least three alleged gun shipments are being investigated by the OSI and Treasury agents. Marriott is alleged to have been connected with only one of them.

According to the allegations, the weapons came from Vietnam, were airlifted to the Armament Laboratory, and then were earmarked for delivery to a company in Atlanta.

Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, who first reported that the investigation was under way, wrote that weapons were being smuggled out of Eglin "for underground distribution to anti-Negro right-wing organizations in the South."

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"No evidence has been developed to date which would indicate that Lt. Col. Marriott was selling these weapons or they were being diverted to subversive elements," the Air Force said in the two-paragraph statement that has been its only official comment on the matter. An unofficial source further confirmed the Air Force's conviction that the weapons were not destined for such right-wing groups.

Marriott, a stocky career officer, has declined to comment on the investigation or the charges.

At least some of the weapons cited in the probe are Russian-designed AK-13 submachine guns, which are used by Communist forces in Vietnam. Many American GIs carry captured AK-13s as secondary weapons because the weapon can take more punishment than the standard issue M-16.

Col. Marriott's duties have taken him intermittently to Vietnam. One officer said that one of the shipments being investigated took place after Marriott last returned to the U.S.

AK-13s sometimes are shipped to American training bases so that troops can be familiarized with them. "But we don't have any facility to test that kind of weapon here," an Eglin officer said.

Col. Abner Martin, commanding officer of the lab, declined to say whether small arms from Vietnam are routinely shipped into and out of the Armament Laboratory.

"You're pressing me for information that might deal with the investigation," he said.

"That's one of the questions the investigation will cover," an official spokesman said.

The Armament Laboratory at Eglin is a major research and development center. According to an Air Force brochure, it provides "exploratory and advanced development of non-nuclear air armament."

Some of the lab's work is classified top secret, but there has been no suggestion in the present matter that security has been compromised.

Col. Martin, said Marriott is "a fine worker and I have no complaints with him."

The Air Force was asked how many guns, if any, left the base; the type and number of weapons involved, the name of the alleged Atlanta recipient and the number of incidents being investigated. The answer to each questions was that it was being investigated.

Treasury spokesmen in Washington said they have received no reports on the matter from their field agents.